C U R R E N T D E V E L O P M E N T S I N T H E E A S T E R N

E U R O P E A N C H U R C H E S

from the East-European desk of the World Council of Churches

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Visit of the World Council of Churches to the Russian Churches

In 1958 mutual contacts were started between the World Council of Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, and these contacts have since been extended.

The first meeting took place in Utrecht (Holland) in August, 1958, between eminent leaders of both groups. In 1959 the Russian Church sent two observers to Geneva for some weeks, in order to acquaint themselves with the many different branches of work organised by the headquarters of the World Council. The same observers then attended the meetings of the Central Committee of the WCC at Rhodes in August 1959, in order to study the procedure of this ecumenical body of representatives.

After receiving their reports, Patriarch Alexij of Moscow and all Russia confirmed the invitation to the WCC to send a delegation to the USSR, in order to continue and deepen these contacts. This delegation was expected to arrive in Moscow at the beginning of December, 1959, and its expected arrival was announced officially in the November number of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" The delegation of the WCC was led by its General Secretary, Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft*.

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* The other delegates were: The Rev. Francis House, WCC associate general secretary, British, a member of the Church of England; Dr. Nick Nissiotis, assistant director of the WCC's Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, Greek, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church; Dr. O. Frederick Nolde, New York, New York, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, a joint agency of the WCC and the International Missionary Council, United States, a member of the United Lutheran Church in America; and U. Kyaw Than, Rangoon, Burma, Baptist, administrative secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference. Alexander de Weymarn, who is on the staff of the General Secretariat of the WCC, accompanied the delegation as interpreter.

The delegates left Geneva airport together and were welcomed at Moscow airport by His Eminence Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitzi and Kolomna, head of the Foreign Department of the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

During their stay in Moscow the delegation had very friendly discussions with Metropolitan Nikolai, which carried the mutual understanding reached at Utrecht a stage further and strengthened the links between the WCC and the Church in Moscow.

The delegation was officially received three times by His Holiness Patriarch Alexij of Moscow and all Russia, the last time being at a dinner at the Hotel Ukraina.

Their Russian hosts also arranged, through the Orthodox Church in Moscow, Leningrad and Riga, for the ecumenical delegation to visit other Christian churches in the Soviet Union. They were thus able to visit the Lutheran Church in the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic (under the leadership of Archbishop Turs). The Archbishop of the Lutheran Church in Esthonia, D. Kiivit, was also present. They visited His Holiness Patriarch Katholikos of the Armenian Church in Etchmiadzin Vasgen I (Armenian Socialist Soviet Republic) at the foot of Mount Ararat. They also attended services in the Baptist and Evangelical-Christian Churches in Moscow.

All the church services attended by the ecumenical delegation were crowded. They also had an opportunity to attend some week-day services, where the attendance was smaller, but the fellowship in prayer closer.

In Moscow, Leningrad, Riga and Etchmiadzin the delegates received a warm Christian welcome accompanied by true Russian hospitality and kindness.

The meetings with representatives of the state department for religious affairs were also arranged in a way which marked the importance of the guest-delegation.

The visit to Russia of the delegation from the WCC certainly helped to promote understanding between the WCC and the Church in the USSR. This is clearly apparent in the speeches made by His Holiness the Patriarch Alexij of Moscow and all Russia, and by Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the WCC, on their last evening in Russia before returning to Geneva on the 17th December. The text of these speeches follows.

Speech of Patriarch Alexius

We are glad to welcome as dear guests of the Russian Orthodox Church, our brethren in Christ, representing the Christian churches united around the World Council of Churches, on Russian soil at the altars of ancient Orthodox shrines.

The Russian Orthodox Church looks with sympathy at the efforts of our Christian brethren to overcome centuries-old divisions and to reunite men who worship God in different ways, by working together in God's field. Our Church will help them in that task.

Studying your already considerable achievements in that good work has been to us a source of consolation and deep spiritual satisfaction. We shall invoke God's blessing upon your efforts in the future. We shall strengthen our spiritual friendship while endeavouring to reveal to you the treasures of our ancient faith transmitted to us by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church.

You have had the opportunity of seeing for yourselves the piety and devoutness of the faithful people of God in our crowded churches. You have been able to see how important liturgical life and common prayer is to us Orthodox Christians. Our strength lies in the sacraments of the Church through the mystery of which comes the unseen but real presence of the Lord Himself among us.

This remains perhaps beyond the comprehension of those observers who, seeing the Russian Church from outside, express their astonishment because of her vitality. That strength does not come from ourselves. It proceeds from the quickening grace of the Holy Ghost, and is due to the guidance of Divine Providence leading Christ's Church by ways inscrutable, known to God alone; thus we believe that separation of our church from the state has been accomplished for the good of the Church.

The relations of the Russian Church with the Christian world at large, beyond the boundaries of our country, have been strengthened in recent years. Bonds of fraternity and friendship have been tightened with Christians of all denominations.

Our Church welcomes and supports in the contemporary world everything that helps to strengthen world peace, to improve mutual understanding between men and to build human society on love, freedom and justice.

We witness with great satisfaction that much has been done in this respect. Still more could be done in the future if all men of good will would unite their efforts in this direction.

Remaining above all in communion of prayer and canon law with our sister-churches, the autocephalous national branches of the Universal Orthodox Church, we pray for the re-union of all Christian churches. We are induced to do so by our Lord's commandment about the oneness of men in the bond of peace and love.

That is the supreme goal of the World Council of Churches. As its General Secretary, Dr. Visser 't Hooft has stressed, the World Council of Churches is not a "World Church"; and its purpose is to promote unity exclusively by spiritual means and with full recognition of the independence and particular charisma of each church and creed. We trust that the day will come when all may be one, when our Saviour's promise will be fulfilled: "and they shall be one flock and one Shepherd" (St. John, X, 16).

Speech of Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft

On this last day of our visit to the Holy Orthodox Church of Russia we are most glad to have the opportunity to give expression to our deep gratitude to your Holiness for a number of benefactions which have been bestowed on us. We thank you first of all for the invitation to pay this visit to the Church of Russia. We thank you for the truly fraternal reception given to us. We thank you for the opportunity to come to know the spiritual life of the Church as it expressed itself above all in its services of worship to Almighty God and to our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the opportunity given to us to meet also the Lutheran, Armenian and Baptist Churches with which your Church entertains fraternal relationship. We thank you above all for the fact that wherever we went we were received as brethren who belong to one and the same family of believers in our common Lord and Saviour.

It is the purpose of the World Council to be an instrument of that gathering together of the children of God for which, according to St. John's gospel, our Lord gave His life. And we hope that our little delegation, representing as it does five different churches, has been a sign and token of the realization of that purpose.

It is the great privilege of Christians that when they meet together they find that, whatever may be the difference in language, in culture, in national history, they have a common basis which makes them recognize each other as children of one Father, and brothers for whom the Saviour died. We have had the happy experience that because of this common basis we found a common spiritual language between the faithful of your Church and ourselves. That is also the reason why, in our informal discussions about the relationships between the Orthodox Church of Russia and the World Council of Churches, it was not difficult to arrive at an understanding concerning the next steps to be taken. We are happy to hear that your Holy Synod has already approved further measures to increase direct contacts and interchange and we do not doubt that in the coming years the relationships will grow increasingly profitable for both sides.

We leave with deep thankfulness in our hearts for the faithful devotion of Christians in whose worship we have shared. Our hope for the future of the Church of Christ in Russia is based upon the scriptural truth that the Word of God is not bound, and will continue its saving work in the future as it has in the past. Your church as well as other churches in the Soviet Union have shown in troubled times that they live by that power which comes from the Holy Spirit and this power is eternal and ever creative. All churches in the world have entered into a period of history in which their

faith will be tested. The changes in the social and cultural situation create new conditions in which the faith once delivered to the saints will have to be expressed in new forms. We will all together have to find the right answers to these new needs and we cherish the hope that your church with its age-old tradition may, in that process, be found to renew its strength.

Our visit to the Holy Orthodox Church of Russia has no political purposes. Nevertheless the very fact that personal contacts have been established in a spirit of friendship and Christian understanding is an important contribution to better international relations. The World Council of Churches reflects the concern of its member churches, which they also express on their own behalf, for the promotion of peace, justice and freedom. Through the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs it maintains day-to-day contact with government officials who are responsible for international decisions and seeks to make constructive proposals concerning the solution of international problems. In offering this Christian testimony, the World Council steers its course between two unacceptable extremes. On the one hand, it refuses identification with any political idealogy or national position and avoids political entanglements. On the other hand, it cannot rest content with vague generalities, because it knows that men often have cried "peace, peace" when there is no peace. The Christian witness must therefore be addressed to the concrete realities of the ever-contemporaneous situation in order to express more fully in human relations God's will for peace, justice and freedom on earth. And the churches are called to teach that only when all nations are willing to make sacrifices in the cause of peace do they have the right to expect that they will enjoy the fruits of peace.

In all their work together in the World Council the member churches seek to share with one another the diversity of spiritual gifts which they have been given by the One Spirit for their mutual enrichment and mutual correction. And as the Executive Committee wrote to Your Holiness in 1955 at the beginning of the new contacts which led to the present happy relationships, the other Churches in the Council especially value the rich contributions already made by the Orthodox Churches.

They ardently desire to receive from the Russian Orthodox Church also the fruits of its rich history and contemporary Christian experience. We thank God for all the treasures of mystical experience and practical obedience in daily life; of liturgical community life and personal commitment; of the inheritance of the certainties of the faith and of interpretation of the eternal verities in ways which are meaningful for this generation.

Our prayer as we part is that all that has passed between us during the last eighteen months, and especially during this visit, may lead to a fuller sharing of all these treasures for the peace and unity of the whole Church of Christ and the fulfillment of its mission in the world.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement.

The Meetings of the Central Committee of the WCC at Rhodes

(Comments made by an Observer)

Under this heading the two Observers sent by the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to Rhodes - Father V.Borovoi and W. S. Alexeev - have published a report in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No. 10, giving their impressions of the meetings of the Central Committee of the WCC at Rhodes in August, 1959.

They begin by stressing the fact that they had been invited to attend these meetings as the guests of the WCC and of the Greek organising committee for the Conference, and that they listened to "a great many expressions of love, respect and gratitude to our Russian Orthodox Church and to our great Fatherland."

"They attended all the plenary sessions, were able to follow the discussions of the sub-committees, and to hear the official reports of the Executive Committee, of the General Secretary and of the heads of the different Departments of the WCC, as well as the statements and speeches by different members of the Central Committee, and the speeches and discussions of the representatives of the Greek Church and of the Greek State. They also attended all the receptions and other activities."

This gave them an opportunity "to understand the great problems confronting the WCC today, and to make the personal acquaintance of its leaders and thinkers."

"The discussions of the Central Committee at Rhodes were extremely fair and objective." They then enumerate the different discussions which were carried on "in a spirit of mutual respect and with complete tolerance for other points of view."

The Observers from Moscow describe the various points on the agenda of the Rhodes meetings, mentioning the separate speakers under the Chairmanship of Dr. Franklin Clark Fry (USA). With regard to the voting on the different questions, they remark that "it was not necessary to count the votes, because the overwhelming majority of the 90 members of the Central Committee were in favour of the proposals".

The important Resolution adopted by the Central Committee on "the relation of the WCC to the Russian Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate" was reproduced word for word in the Moscow report. It suggests not only an exchange of literature between the WCC and the Church in Moscow, but also the exchange of theological students in due course.

"The message sent by His Eminence the Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitzi and Kolomna, which was solemnly read during one of the plenary sessions, made a big impression on the members of the Committee. (The text is published in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No. 9, 1959). This message was received with long, unanimous, sincere applause. The Chairman,

Dr. F. Clark Fry, rose and turned to address some words of gratitude to us (Observers from the Moscow Patriarchate), requesting us to pass on to His Eminence, Metropolitan Nikolai, the profound gratitude of the Central Committee for his wise and sincere Christian message. Dr. Fry also requested us to assure the Metropolitan of the Central Committee's high esteem proved by its warm reception of the Metropolitan's message."

The report of the Orthodox observers goes on to say, "At the close of this session, and in the days which followed, we had conversations with the members of all the delegations, and they all asked us to pass on to Metropolitan Nikolai their cordial thanks for his message. They all emphasised the depth of his message, its pertinence, the aptitude of its wording, going to the very core of the great questions which confront the WCC. They were all impressed by its tone of goodwill, impartiality and modesty and by the authority of his judgment, which was worthy of a great Church and a great country. The press (in England, the USA, Greece and other countries) immediately published friendly articles commenting on the Metropolitan's message and quoting extracts from it. English and American journalists asked us to grant them interviews, and discussed the Metropolitan's message with us in a very cordial spirit. At a press conference Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, the General Secretary, spoke very warmly about the development of the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement. He explained that "the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was just beginning to acquaint itself with the work of the WCC", and alluded to his forthcoming visit to Moscow in December, 1959."

The Orthodox observers then describe how "the Conference at Rhodes approved the resolutions of the Commission of the Churches for International Affairs, demanding the stopping of atomic tests."

"The Central Committee welcomed the meeting between Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Eisenhower, and also the idea of a summit-conference. It also urged that the war in Algeria between the French Government and the Algerian army of liberation should be terminated, if necessary through "international" mediation between the two groups in Algeria." In this connection the names of two members of the Central Committee are mentioned - Pastor P. Dagadu (of Ghana) and Pastor Charles Westphal (of France) - both of whom protested against the preparations of the French Government to explode an experimental atomic bomb in the Sahara.

"The Conference at Rhodes expressed its disapproval of all forms of experiment with atomic weapons and urged that they be stopped", continues the report of the Orthodox observers. They also mention the proposals made by the Commission of the Churches for International Affairs to the Conference of Foreign Ministers in Geneva.

With regard to the integration of the IMC with the WCC, the Orthodox observers note that an assurance was given at the Rhodes Conference that such integration need by no means involve any danger of proselytism, but that it would strengthen the ecumenical trend. However, they mention the names of those delegates who warned the Conference against the danger of being in too much of a hurry to integrate the IMC.

Finally the two Orthodox observers describe the preparations approved by the Central Committee in readiness for the Third Assembly of the WCC to be held at New Delhi in 1961. They give the names of the ecumenical leaders appointed to form a special Commission to work on the main theme, "Jesus Christ - the Light of the World".

They also mention the question of the distribution of places at the Assembly, stating that "the Churches of America, England and the West European countries are in the majority, in comparison with the rest of the world."

Finally the observers describe the discussions held at Rhodes on the relation between the Church in the West and in the East. They mention Professor D. E. Schlink (Germany) and Professor Chrysostomos Konstandinidis (Greece), who had both spoken on this burning question. The observers say that no Protestant has ever spoken with such sympathy and understanding about Orthodoxy as Professor Schlink. Professor Konstandinidis' remarks were valuable because they helped Protestants to understand the teaching of Orthodoxy.

Concluding remarks: "There were not many theological discussions at the Conference, owing to the large number of participants; the great variety of confessions represented is overburdening the Conference with organisational questions and prevented much discussion of theological questions which might have revealed differences of opinion between Orthodox and Protestants.

The Orthodox observers close their report by saying: "This brief and somewhat selective report on the work and main decisions of the Central Committee of the WCC at Rhodes does not, of course, present a complete picture. That would require more space, more time and more historical perspective. And that depends on the future, which will bring a solution of the main problems of the Conference."

Guide to the City of Moscow

The latest Guide to the City of Moscow (published in an edition of 100,000 copies) includes a list of historic "Churches, Monasteris and Cathedrals", four pages long.

This guide makes it easy to find all the 55 churches and church-buildings enumerated.

29 of the churches are described as "former" churches which are no longer used for church purposes, but are of architectural importance and are therefore open to visitors.

The Orthodox churches used for church-services, given in the Guide, are the following: The Church of the Suffering Mother of God (1790), The Church of the Archangel Gabriel (1707), The Church of Ivan the Warrior (1717), The Church of the Prophet Elijah (1690), A Church bearing the

same name (dating from 1702), The Church of Krutizkoe Podvorie, The Church of Saint Nicholas in Khamovniki (a section of Moscow) (1682), The Church of Peter and Paul (1700), A Church bearing the same name (dating from 1711), The Church of the Birth of Christ in Ismailovo (1700), The Sacristy Church (1701), The Tichvinskaia Church in Alexeevka (early 18th century), The Church of the Ascension at Gontchary (1654), The Church of the Apostle Philip (1683), The Cathedral of the Epiphany at Elokhovo (1835). Four other churches belong to Orthodox cemeteries. The Armenian Church is also a cemetery church.

The Andronnikov Monastery (15th to 18th century) is dedicated to the memory of Andrei Rubliov, the famous icon-painter.

The famous Cathedrals in the Kremlin at Moscow, including the Cathedral of St. Basil in the Red Square, the Novodevitch Monastery, etc., are not listed as churches but separately as museums.

In addition to the Orthodox Churches, the Guide mentions the following buildings where regular religious services are held: The Kostel (Roman Catholic Church) (1832), The Mosque, The Chapel of the Baptists and Gospel-Christians, The Synagogue.

The exact address of every church is given, whether it is still used or not.

(The addresses of the other churches in use in Greater Moscow can be supplied on request).

"The Communist Party and the Soviet Government on the Church and Religion"

(Moscow, Gospolitizdat, 1959)

This little pamphlet of 120 pages contains the full text of all the official statements made by the Communist Party and by the competent Departments of the Soviet State concerning the problem of the Church and Religion.

It is a miniature edition of the Magna Charta of communist atheism, beginning with Marx, Engels and Lenin up to the different proclamations of the Communist Party ever since the revolution of October 1918.

The different statements on the programme of the Communist Party are followed by the Decree passed on the 10th November, 1954, by Krushchev on "the mistakes committed (and hence to be avoided) in making scientific-atheist propaganda."

Khrushchev alludes to God

In his speech on the 31st October, 1959, Mr. Khrushchev, First President of the Ministerial Council of the USSR and First Secretary of the Communist Party, alluded to God. He said, "Times are changing. Even some of the most active advocates of "power politics" are beginning to realise that today this policy cannot prove successful. It is only the most militant spirits of the Western world who still cling to their old forms, the relics of an obsolete way of thought."

One example of this was the regrettable decision of the American Congress to hold what they called "A Week of Prayer for the peoples living under the yoke of Communism" and "renewed intercession for their liberation...."

What is the purpose of such intercession?

Khrushchev: "When the activists in the West pray to God to liberate the peoples in the socialist countries, if we were also to pray to God to liberate the peoples who are under the domination of capitalism we should put God in a very awkward position. (Hearty applause). How is God to decide? If He sides with the majority of the human race and adopts a democratic attitude, He is bound to decide in favour of socialism! (Terrific applause). But I am wandering from the subject of my report ..."

Atheist Propaganda must go deeper

The fortnightly periodical "Partiinaia Zhisn" (No. 23, December, 1959), published since 1919 by the publishers of "Pravda" on behalf of the Communist Party, contains an article entitled "Proletarians of every land, unite!" which urges the need for atheist propaganda to go deeper.

Scientific-atheist propaganda is one of the most important elements in the struggle to train the future leaders of communist society. One is therefore particularly glad to see "in the columns of our natural science, religious history, written by people who have broken away from religion."

Reports of this kind are given in the "Stavropoliskaia Pravda" (Nearer Caucasus) and in "Tembovskaia Pravda" (Central Russia), also in "Zakarpatskaia Pravda" (West Ukraine), the "Krasnoiarskii Rabotschii" (Siberia), etc. They are all written by upright people, some of them members of the Communist Party, and with the best of intentions. "Nevertheless these articles are seriously inadequate" because "they do not meet life's challenges and are not related closely enough to actual conditions in the Soviet Union."

In the USSR the futility and pointlessness (nesostoiatel'nost') of religious dogmas is proved not merely in theory but also in practice, by the Soviet order of society as a whole.

The purpose of atheist propaganda (says the paper) is to help Soviet people to understand the changes "which have taken place as a result of the victory of Socialism". It is not sufficient to point out the contradictions in the New Testament, or to draw attention to the fact that the class-interests of the exploiting class are reflected in the gospels. "All that is true, but it is too abstract, and too detached from the Soviet situation."

The fact must not be overlooked that the "Tserkovniki" (church-people) are trying to persuade their followers "that the teaching of the New Testament is compatible with communism."

The propagandists of atheism must expose such assertions as completely unfounded. For they find their way even into the sermons preached in the churches, and give people a false concept of Soviet life.

"The preaching of Christian ethics must therefore be countered by propaganda about atheist ethics which are free from religious aberrations." But one finds little or nothing in atheist articles (says the paper).

The main objection of "Partiinaia Zhisn" is that the antireligious articles deal too much with religion as it used to be in the past. It is true, questions of religious history and religious rites are of interest to everyone (continues the article). But religious history is not an end in itself; it is simply a means towards education in atheism, a weapon for combatting religious survivals.

In atheist propaganda attention must be directed primarily to the religious customs practised in a certain place (not to religious customs in general). Stress must be laid on the fact that such local religious customs "are incompatible with the vital interests of Soviet people, from the scientific point of view."

Scientific-atheist propaganda therefore needs revising and improving (says the paper). It ought to be comprehensible to everyone and to answer questions concerning the structure of the cosmos, the beginning of life and of human life, the achievements of astronomy, biology, physiology, physics, chemistry, etc. - i. e. the sciences which confirm the truth of the materialist view of life and the evolution of nature and of society in the spirit of materialism. Hitherto this had only been done very inadequately in the Soviet press. Hence the criticism.

We must not confine ourselves to rejecting religious ideology. We must rather go to life itself to find the evidence needed against religion, and so convince our readers."

For instance, it is said that "the festivals of the Church present continual opportunities for drunkenness; and the clergy make use of them for extracting money from people's pockets."

"These facts must not be concealed, of course. But that is not enough. We must recognise that the churches too are trying to combat drunkenness and making great efforts to improve people's morals".

"The real point is that the 'Tserkovniki' make use of the religious festivals and customs to influence the ideas of believers and to enforce their own convictions." It is therefore important "to expose the sermons preached at church festivals."

One very good practical form of atheist propaganda is "the publication of letters received from people (clergy and laity) who have given up religion, because these are taken to be typical of Soviet life today and exercise a strong influence on the reader."

"We must help all the honest, conscientious people who have made mistakes (about religion), and who now realise - through the great transformation which has taken place in life in the Soviet Union, and through the influence of public opinion - that man does not need religion."

Breaking-away from religion "is a great event in man's life. It is a victory for the future, a victory of the Marx-Leninist ideology which challenges people to use their brains."

The titles of the "confessions of former believers" published in the press are unmistakable in their implications: "I see light before me again", "I have rediscovered the joy of living", "The way to the Light", "From darkness to light."

Writers must be found who can undertake this kind of work, "who will write about our workers in town and country and especially about our wonderful young people in such a way that Soviet citizens are persuaded in favour of the materialist ethic."

"Why we have broken away from Religion"

Gospolitizdat (state publishing house for political literature), Moscow, 1959.

This short but comprehensive anthology contains the confessions of people who were formerly members of various denominations of the Christian Church, but broke away from their religious faith in 1957-1958.

The reasons for their conversion to atheism are given by:

1. eight people who were formerly Orthodox Christians (including two priests, one candidate for the priesthood, one graduate of the Theological Academy in Moscow, another student from a religious seminary, a monk and a woman);
2. three people who were formerly Roman Catholics (a priest, a monk and a layman);
3. eight people who were formerly Baptists (6 men, 2 women);
4. four people who used to belong to the Pentecostalists (1 man, 3 women);
5. six people who used to be Seventh-Day Adventists (5 men, 1 woman);
6. one man who used to be an Old Believer (the Old Believers are a branch of the Orthodox Church which separated from it in the 17th century);

7. one man who used to belong to the Murashkov sect;

8. five men who used to be Jehovah's Witnesses.

The titles of the different contributions are as follows:
"From the obscurity of the Church to the light of true life",
"The way from belief to unbelief",
"Don't hand anyone over to religion",
"Religion is a malady which can be cured",
"What my life was like in the Monastery",
"Communism leads mankind to Truth",
"A tree-stump with no branches",
"I want to take the right course",
"Science - the light of the World",
"Happiness has to be worked for",
"I've broken away from religion once and for all",
"I hope other people won't repeat my mistakes",
"A bitter lesson", etc.

This anthology of atheist confessions has an introduction and a concluding chapter, which are important.

The Introduction says: "The reports contained in this anthology giving the reasons why their authors finally turned to communism are very varied, because their authors found their way to atheism by different ways: one by studying books on natural science and atheism, others because they realised that religion is incompatible with communist thought. But the reason why these widely differing types of people turned away from religion is the fact of Socialism. "Times have changed - no more needs to be said," as one of them writes."

From the Conclusion to the anthology: "Every report begins by stating that people may turn to religion for various reasons: because of some personal grief, because of some misfortune when there seems no way out of one's despair.

Didn't anyone help these sorely-tried people, when they were tempted to make the mistake of seeking consolation in religion? Hadn't they any friends?

One man sought consolation in an icon; another sang hymns with a Christian sect ...

Why did people turn to religion in the past? Wasn't it because they were poor and had no rights?"

Many external causes have led people to become religious - the book is quite right on that point.

But the confessions of former Christians also show what were the reasons which led them to abondon their faith: "Quite frequently one meets people who believe that there is a sort of 'new religion' today in the Soviet Union which has given up its former attitude of hostility to science.

The reports in this anthology help to show how false this idea is. They thus help to show the relation between Christianity, human reason and science in the right perspective."

The priests and clergy of the various Christian churches and groups are never tired of repeating that we only live once and that man may lose his soul for eternity. Yes, we only live once. That is why we must see that our lives are filled with the flame of life, i. e. that we keep pace with communism and with the millions of people who are creating the new communist order of society. People must feel that they are citizens with full rights in our great epoch of history, that they are helping to shape the future .....

One of our contributors is right in saying "that Paradise is to be built on earth." So don't look for Paradise in a life Beyond, where no Paradise exists. Give up religious superstitution: "Ne to seichas vremia" (a new age has dawned).

"The only solution is to give up Religion"

Professor Alexander Osipov, who occupied the Chair of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Theological Academy and the religious seminary of the Russian Orthodox Church in Leningrad, has resigned from his post. The reason he gives is that he feels obliged to abandon the Christian faith.

In a long article published in "Pravda" on the 2nd December, 1959, with the above title, Professor Osipov (who played an active rôle in 1956 in the new edition of the Bible published by the Moscow Patriarchate) gives his personal account of the reasons which led him to take this grave step.

On the 20th December "Izvestia" published an interview with Professor Osipov, which drew the attention of the public in the Soviet Union to Osipov for the second time.

The story of his life, which is woven into the article, says that before the second world war Professor Osipov was a member of the Russian Student Christian Movement in Tallinn (Esthonia), whose leaders regarded Russian communism as "reversion to barbarism".

It was Osipov's own personal decision to study theology in Tartu, although he says that even then he disliked many things in the Orthodox Church.

The decline in his religious faith had already set in, and since then the trend had gone still further. Biblical exegesis attracted him less and less: "I saw that the Bible had nothing in common with the revelation of God on earth".

In 1946 Professor Osipov, who had married in the meantime, began teaching at the new Theological Academy in Leningrad, of which he soon afterwards became Assistant Rector and later on Acting Rector.

But he quarrelled with the Board of the Academy, partly on account of his personal life. His wife had left him taking their two children with her to Western Europe, where she had married again. According to canonical law, he was unable to marry again, because he was a priest.

Osipov goes on to say: "Meantime I was going through another stage in my development. In the 1948-49 and 1949-50 academic years I undertook to deliver a short course of lectures on the history of religion, a subject which had been introduced at the Academy. Research into the history of religion took me much farther than that pious Orthodox "pseudo-scientific" subject I was supposed to teach in order to expose atheism, as had been Metropolitan Gregory's purpose in introducing this course.

This thourough, truly scientific comparative study of religion supplied the last needed link to my atheism, which had been taking shape over the course of many years. Everything fell into place in my mind. I saw the world of religion as single process of the development of false conceptions and superstitions, as a reflection of terrestrial conditions in an empty heaven where there is no place for any supreme spiritual force..."

"In 1955-56 I edited a new edition of the Bible and a separate edition of the New Testament and Psalter. Work on the Bible interested me, but I was depressed by the knowledge that the book would be utilized not in scientific historical research or historical criticism, but as a medium of religious propaganda and for the stupefaction of human souls....."

"My decision to break with religion took more and more definite shape, grew firmer. Why had I not left the Academy several years earlier? The formation of my world outlook was a process that proceeded from stage to stage. It took me some time to overcome the worship of the non-existent, abstract morality that religion preaches. Then I believed for a long time that I could be of some use in the church - since it already exists and believers go to church - by trying to influence pastors who, even if they did talk of faith, would at least not propound the gross superstitions of fanatism.

However, I became more and more convinced with each year that my decision was not right. Behind the backs of those who attempted to become the kind of men I wished them to be there clustered thousands of filthy drones who took advantage of the fine qualities of those men. And with the general reactionary direction that was given to the entire educational process in the theological schools, my efforts to be a bearer and teacher of advanced science and culture only played into the hands of the preaching of darkness and backwardness...."

"I began to see more and more clearly that only a complete break with religion could reconcile me with my conscience and give me the right to consider myself an honest human being. Also, I said to myself: "You taught openly, didn't you?! You preached to all, didn't you?! But now you want to crawl away like a snake in the grass. That is dishonourable. You should have the courage to speak out about your decision just as openly, face to face with people, as you preached that which you have recognized to be erroneous and false. Since you knew how to teach, you must be able to expose what you taught....."

I began to look for a concrete way out of the blind alley. On December 2nd I officially informed the Rector of the Academy that I was giving up my teaching position in the Academy and handed him a letter in which I clearly explained the reasons for my resignation from the church. I asked for this letter to be read to my former colleagues, the teachers, and to the students whom I had taught....." (Pravda, 6. In full.)

The interview with "Isvestia" took the form of question and answer. Some of the questions were as follows:

a) "What effect have the outstanding scientific and technical achievements of recent years had on religious doctrine?"

b) "Is it true that in the struggle between science and religion churchmen are at a disadvantage compared with atheists?"

c) "What is the situation in the Russian Orthodox Church today?"

We quote from the answer to question a): "In my opinion, science and religion are incompatible. The progress of science and engineering is so completely refuting naive religious conceptions and ideas that the outstanding scientific and technical achievements of recent years now do not leave religion a leg to stand on.

The relation of the church to this progress is nevertheless a complex and many-sided question. There is no single religious doctrine. Within Christianity alone what can be applied to Protestantism cannol always be applied to Catholicism or Orthodoxy, and vice versa....."

The reply to question 6) states among other things: "The first thing the three second-year students of the Theological Academy, who visited me on December 3, the day after I left the Academy, said was: 'We understand that it is natural to leave the Academy if one's views on religion have changed. But we cannot imagine your joining with the atheists in their fight against religion, for in this struggle the church is at a disadvantage. And a fight between opponents who are not given equal opportunities is unfair. Are you really going to take part in a fight which is unfair?' I had a vigorous argument with the young men on this score.

I now repeat: that is not true. The following facts must first of all be taken into account.

A scientific world-outlook appeals to the reason and not to the emotions. Whereas in its propaganda and its affirmation of its world-outlook, religion acts primarily and mainly on the emotions. The very concept of faith, as opposed to reason, is emotional....."

"The church exerts influence on the emotions pictorially with its icons, and uses such ancient forms of mysticism and magic as relics, the sacraments, holy water, the consecrated host, incense and so on and so forth...."

"Nor is that all. Religion directs its propaganda at people who have inherited religious superstitions and prejudices that have existed on earth for thousands of years. Although scientific atheism has many predecessors in previous ages among cultured, brilliant personalities who were far ahead of their time, it is still undoubtedly a young and new world outlook...."

"Where a religion and the church have only to maintain that virgin soil of superstition and religious prejudice, atheism must plough a fresh furrow through inherited attitudes, relying upon the all-conquering and irreversible forward-movement of human reason.

How can there be any talk of inequality? Do the representatives of religion want knowledge to keep silent? Do they expect reason, which is probing outer space and exploring remote galaxies of the universe with radio telescopes, to sit back quietly while the ancient gibberish of superstitions of the Stone Age tortures many fine Soviet people and prevents them from contributing to creative progress....."

The answer to question c) contains the following points: "Administratively, the church represents unbridled antidemocratic centralism with dictatorship that reaches out from the centre to the periphery at every level - church, diocese and parish - affecting each category of churchmen according to their rank...."

"The clergy have long ignored the decree 'On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church' which Lenin signed on January 23, 1918, paragraph 13 of which says that the church and its property are given for the use of 'the corresponding religious societies', as well as the decree of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of April 8, 1929, 'On Religious Associations', paragraph 3 of which says that 'a religious society is a local association of believers who have reached the age of 18, of the same religion, trend or doctrine, of at least 20 persons joined together to satisfy their religious requirements as a body'.

But today it is not the believers who invite a priest for that purpose. Instead, they are handed over to appointed 'fathers superior' as 'God's servants', as an 'articulate herd'....."

"This atmosphere of dictatorship and lack of responsibility creates an extremely unhealthy situation in the church and offers a wide field for all sorts of abuses and even infringements of the law....."

Many people go to church only because they have been used to doing so since childhood, because their mothers and grandmothers taught them to, or 'just in case', 'to be on the safe side'. They christen their children 'just in case'. And they bring their dead to the church for burial because it is so hard to take the body of someone near and dear and simply bury it in the ground. The church will perform a funeral service. It has words of compassion and beautiful prayers. The sorrow of parting is made easier with words about 'meeting in the next world'....."

"Science and Religion" - a new atheist periodical

A new monthly publication entitled "Nauka i Religia" (Science and Religion) has recently appeared in the USSR. It is intended primarily for home consumption and is therefore not on sale everywhere.

The first volume of this new periodical contains articles by eminent Soviet scientists and intellectuals, and essays on atheism including some contributions by foreign writers on the problem of "belief or disbelief".

"Nauka i Religia" was prominently reviewed in the December 1959 number of "Voprossy Philosophii" (Problems of Philosophy) published by the Academy of Science in the USSR. Among other things this review says: "The process of transition from socialism to communism assumes a general development in the cultural level of all members of society..." As N. S. Krushchev said at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party, "we must already think today about the education of the people of tomorrow..."

"In our education of the working people the spirit of communism, scientific-atheist propaganda plays an outstanding part. Propaganda must not only eradicate the vestiges of religion which still survive in people's consciousness; it must also equip every worker with a sound knowledge of the bases of modern knowledge supported by a dialectic-materialist view of life on a scientific foundation. This is the purpose of the new periodical."

The introductory article is written by Dr. A. N. Nesmeanov, an eminent Professor. He expresses the conviction that "the false concept based on religion will finally be eliminated through the impact of the militant atheist view of life based on scientific concepts."

The author of the second article, Professor G. D. Bernal, Chairman of the World Peace Council, urges the editors of the paper to clarify the questions which arise from the interrelation of religion and science.

Another article on "the future (social-economic) development of the USSR and the elimination of religious survivals" describes the task which faces Soviet society in educating and enlightening its citizens on scientific-communist lines. "Our task consists in seizing the most favourable opportunities for the development of communism (says the article), so that the last vestiges of religion may be eliminated as quickly as possible, and all Soviet citizens may be trained to be conscious, active workers for communism."

The section entitled "Man the master of Nature" contains contributions from such eminent Soviet scientists as W. A. Ambartsumian and A. I. Oparin.

An interview with B. W. Kukarkin, the astronomer, deals with the second cosmic rocket "Lunik" launched by the USSR.

"Voprossy Philosophii" comments: "In this section W. Lwow's remarks with the presumptuous title 'Whose side are you on, Professor Shepley?' make a very unfortunate impression.

Lwow's reference was to Dr. Ch. Shepley, author of a book on astronomy published in the USA, criticising him for being "too compliant in his attitude to religion."

"The Soviet critic shows lack of respect for the great American scientist ... He must be reprimanded, because there is no logical argument in his criticism".....

"In our view, superficial quarrels of this kind are incompatible with the atheist struggle against the religious confusion of bourgeois scientists.

"By the atheist struggle we understand systematic, deep enlightenment concerning the falsity and harmfulness of the religious illusion. It means refuting the false, unscientific religious concepts and defending the concepts of dialectic materialism. Lastly, it involves a thorough analysis of the obvious contradictions in the view of life held by the bourgeois scientists, in order to free ourselves from religious and idealistic prejudices. Our new atheist periodical must therefore be more careful and penetrating in analysing the contradictions in the ideas of representatives of bourgeois culture, and the reactionary character of religion as a whole."

An article on "Orthodoxy today" insists that the Russian Orthodox Church has not changed, in spite of the change in its attitude towards the October Revolution, and in spite of its loyalty to the Soviet government.

The author wants to refute the attempts of the Orthodox clergy to prove that the laws by which the world is governed virtually express the idea of God. He criticises especially "the presumption of the Orthodox Church" which is(he says) presumptuous because it claims to reflect the deepest spiritual substance of our age and "to perceive the finger-prints of divine providence in the phenomenon of our time."

In the circumstances existing in the communist order of society (now in full process of formation) "the idolatry of suffering" advocated by the Orthodox Church is completely out-of-date and reactionary, says the article.

The first number of "Nauka i Religia" also deals with the Roman Catholic Church, i. e. with the first Encyclical of the Pope John XXIII. "Voprossy Philosophii" comments:

"The Encyclical shows that the Vatican is still as reactionary and anti-communist as ever ...."

The article (in "Nauka i Religia") points out that under the new Pope John XXIII, as under his predecessor Pius XII, anti-communism is the policy of the Vatican." Even after N. S. Khrushchev's visit to the USA, which has released the international tension, the Vatican still clings to its reactionary policy of the cold war.

In an article on "The Attitude of the Soviet State to the Church", A. Valentinov replies to the anti-communist phantasies of bourgeois propaganda and stresses the fact that "there is complete freedom of conscience in the USSR". No one in the USSR may permit himself "to hurt other people on account of their religious ideas, which would be detrimental to their health", But that was also why "the Soviet Government prohibits the activities of fanatical sects".

In the section "Letter-Box", "Nauka i Religia" reveals its particular interest in an exchange of experiences in the sphere of atheist propaganda.

"Voprossy Philosophii" comments that the title "Atheists at Work" misses the point, because it does not do justice to its purpose. The examples given of atheist activities are not sufficiently drawn from life (says Voprossy Phil.") and therefore do not reflect the results of the efforts made in the different areas of the USSR.

"Nauka i Religia" also reproduces a photograph of "members of a new sect started in Switzerland", which it describes as "the height of religious nonsense". The purpose of the new sect is to unite all religions under the chairmanship of the Queen of England, its "sacred universal Buler". The worshippers bow respectfully to an empty throne, representing their "Ruler of the world."

"Voprossy Philosophii" sums up its comments on "Nauka i Religia" as follows:

"The language of the new atheist periodical is suited to meet the intelligence of a wide circle of readers. But it must be improved. The periodical's contribution to communist ethics is inadequate. For "the propagation of the communist ethic and the exposure of religious morals is the most important task of all atheist activity."

"Nauka i Religia" should therefore introduce a special section on "Questions of Ethics", because the clergy of all religions, especially of the Christian sects, are particularly interested in ethics.

Contemporary Bourgeois Philosophy and Religion

"Voprosy Filosofii" ("Problems of Philosoph") No. 11, 1959, published by the Academy of Scientific Knowledge in the USSR (the Institute of Philosophy), contains a long article by T. I. Oizerman, the pioneer of atheism, on "Contemporary" Bourgeois Philosophy and Religion."

For the first time this leading paper is publishing short summaries of the articles in English. The following is the English summary of Oizerman's article.

The original precondition for the existence of religion, namely, man's enslavement by the spontaneous forces of nature, is eliminated by the development of the productive forces, and scientific progress dissipates religious stupefaction. Capitalism, on the other hand, intensifies in every way man's enslavement by the spontaneous forces of social development, and thereby constantly reproduces and strengthens religious oppression. This gives rise to the contradictory character of the religious views held by men in bourgeois society. These are contradictions between the scientific and the religious explanations of reality, between practical conduct and the behests of religion, between reason and faith. These contradictions are expressed in the controversy between

the modernists and the integralists (fundamentalists), in the discussion between K. Jaspers and R. Bultman, etc.

Contemporary bourgeois philosophers take account of the above-mentioned contradictions and willy-nilly endeavour to reconcile them. Thus existentialism, which is occasionally regarded as an irreligious, and in part even an atheistic theory, actually constitutes a refined justification of fideism, inasmuch as the existentialist conception of existence, on the one hand, and the transcendental, on the other, like the existential critique of science and knowledge in general, fully conform with the outlook of religious men and the demands of fideism in the broad sense of the term.

Neo-positivism, despite the fact that it is engaged in constant battle against "metaphysics", is actually only opposed to "rationalist theology", and fully justifies religious notions as being the supposedly necessary expression of "living feeling". This refers not only to Witgenstein, Price and Carnap, but also to Russell, who is undoubtedly opposed to religion subjectively.

Neo-Thomism, the third most influential theory of contemporary bourgeois philosophy, is the most outspoken idealist apology for religion. Not content with "proving" the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc., neo-Thomism endeavours to state a case for what is actually the starting point of all idealism - namely, the principle of "harmony" between faith and reason: many of them categorically reject the possibility of such harmony. Even they, however, by setting the irrational against the rational, engage in what is a refined apology for the religious outlook. Thus, the principal trends of contemporary bourgeois philosophy, despite all the differences between and polemics among them, are fundamentally at one in their attitude to religious ideology.

USSR College Courses on the Basis of Scientific Atheism

Uchitel'skaia Gazeta (27th October, 1959)

New facultative lectures on "The Basis of Scientific Atheism" have been introduced into the curriculum of the colleges in the Soviet Union. Their purpose is "to inform the students on general lines how scientific atheism is propagated, to enlighten them about the nature of religion (which is based on class-distinction), to explain the reasons for the existence of religious prejudices and survivals, and to suggest ways and means of overcoming them."

The syllabus includes the following subjects: "Marx' and Lenin's concept of Religion", "Atheism before Marx, and the Atheism of Marx and Lenin", "The scientific and the religious view of life", "A criticism of religious ethics", "The content, form and method of scientific-atheist education".

Communist Youth Magazine on 'Moral Rearmament'

"Hullo, Mr. God? Frank Buchman speaking".

This is the title of an article on Frank Buchman, founder of the Moral Rearmament movement, which appeared in "Komsomol'skaia Pravda" (the Communist youth paper in the USSR) on the 31st January, 1960.

"The telephone has become a common object in people's lives. The telephone system covers the whole world.... but no one has yet ventured to maintain that he has spoken on the telephone with God's head-office in Heaven, or with the Underworld. 'What, no one?" Frank Buchman may object (the 82-year old American from New York); 'I often talk to God - it isn't difficult at all'."

"Decisions of genius often amaze people by their very simplicity. This is the case with Buchman ," continues the paper. "When Buchman talks with God he doesn't use an ordinary telephone ... He tells us that all he needs in order to contact the other world is a 'quiet time'. One must sit in silence in an armchair (otherwise an ordinary chair will do), if possible in an empty room, and listen, preferably with the right ear. Then God will begin to talk to you."

Buchman says, the old man in Heaven enjoys a talk with him. 'I ask God (for something) and then He talks to me ... God answers if He considers it necessary'."

"If Frank Buchman were to play the part of a new Oracle who holds conversations with God and the heavenly powers, and to make a business out of it, there would be nothing special about it. But Buchman's discovery' is far more ambitious than merely to establish contacts with the people in Heaven. The 'inventor' turns his negotiations with God to no lesser purpose than that of transforming this sinful world and healing the morals of mankind. Buchman calls his telephonic communication with heaven 'moral rearmament'."

It is 38 years since it first became known that a certain pastor called Buchman had "some sort of new idea". The capitalist world was in urgent need of new ideas. The capitalists were simply longing for an ideology which would prove a spiritual panacea.

Being a good business man, Frank Buchman understood the slogan of the time; he promised the capitalist bosses to transform the world. For this purpose he offered 'moral rearmament' as a universal panacea....

"Why do people find it so difficlut to live?" asks Buchman. Answer: "Because man is evil, because he is a good-for-nothing. He only needs to be good and then life will immediately smile upon him. The workers must get good wages, and the capitalists must be absolutely honest in their management. Then workers and employers will have equal rights, they will join hands and slap one another on the back."

The article goes on to say that Buchman has no right to "regard himself as the only 'absolutely Christian' person, the 'standard-bearer of Moral Rearmament'. "Did he not give thanks to God in 1936 for the rise of Adolf Hitler?"

In 1952 the Detroit "Labour News" asked Buchman, where he got the money from to pay for his movement, the cost of which is estimated at at least 2 million dollars a year. Buchman could not reply.

"Behind their phrases about non-violence and international reconciliation, Frank Buchman's crusaders wave the flag of anti-communism, the symbol around which the nations of the West are to rally."

"If Moral Rearmament should ever cease to exist, then the world will come to an end" whimpers Frank Buchman, and his disciples follow suit.

"The Buchmannite brotherhood will undoubtedly disappear from the earth some day. But the world will get on quite will without this divine prophet."

Moral Rearmament enjoys the support of men like Konrad Adenauer (the German Federal Chancellor), Oberländer (the German Minister of State), Willy Brandt (Lord Mayor of Berlin), Harry Truman (USA) and Robert Schuman (France), says the article.

H U N G A R Y

The Session of the Presidium of the Hungarian Ecumenical Council

At a session held in December in the bureau of the Ecumenical Council the Presidium of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary made preparations for the Council's general meeting that is to be held shortly.

In his report Bishop Dr. Tibor Bartha, President of the Council, characterized 1959 as the year of success in the struggle for peace. To this effort the Hungarian Evangelical Churches have also make their effective contribution, primarily through the work of the Christian Peace Conference of Prague, The Bishop stated that, at the Rhodes meeting of the Central Committee "our delegates found more understanding with regard to the proper assessment of the life of our churches and to the experiences of the journey in China and expressed his hope for a further strengthening of contacts with the Chinese churches.

Bishop Kaldy, Vice President of the Ecumenical Council, reported on the work of the Christian Peace Conference at Prague. General Secretary Gyula Muraközy submitted a report about the visits of the foreign guests of the Council and his participation in the work of various international conferences. Acting on a report by Dean Palfy,

the session dealt with matters pertaining to theological study; then the budget and the publications of the Ecumenical Council were discussed.

C Z E C H O S L O V A K I A

Atheism as World Phenomenon

Czech Protestant leader Joseph Hromadka of Prague told a German audience in Frankfurt (Germany) that atheism must not be equated with Communism.

The Prague theologian declared that it would be "catastrophic" to look on atheism as a political force because it is officially proclaimed by Communist states.

According to Dr. Hromadka atheism is a general human phenomenon of titanic proportions, attributable to science and technology. He said the job was to convince the Communists of this fact.

"We can wage a fruitful struggle with the Communists only if we understand their new society and have goodwill towards it, and if we assume responsibility for the new society and for Communist society", the professor observed.

Claiming that Communist rule in Eastern Europe was due to decades of omission on the part of democracy in the past, Dr. Hromadka asserted that the clock could not be turned back. However, he said, Christians could challenge Communists with a new reality. They could show them - not by discussion, but by practical conduct - that the Communist idea about all Christians being "either reactionaries or obscurantists" was false.

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